

~~SECRET~~

file

25X1

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

28 April 1986

DATE

5/1/86 file

DOC NO

ALAM 86-20020

OCR

3

P&amp;PD

1

Sourced

LIBERIA: Doe's Growing Vulnerability

25X1

Summary

Since the inauguration of civilian rule last January, Liberia's political and economic problems have continued to grow, threatening the stability of President Samuel Doe's regime. We believe that Doe probably is unwilling and unable to restore popular legitimacy to his rule and reverse the worsening economic conditions that have fueled broad-based discontent. Doe faces potential challenges from an organized political opposition, disgruntled students and workers, and externally-based dissidents. More significantly, discontent has risen in the military over late pay and ethnic favoritism. Although popular protest remains muted, and no individual civilian or military leader has emerged as a formidable rival for power, continued economic decay almost certainly will further erode support for Doe, and probably will spark strikes, protests, [redacted] during the next twelve months. [redacted]

25X6

25X6

25X6

This memorandum was requested by Charles Freeman, Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Department of State. It was prepared by [redacted] West Branch of the Africa Division of the Office of African and Latin American Analysis. This paper was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Questions and comments are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Africa Division [redacted].

25X1

25X1

ALA M 86-20020

25X1

S E C R E T

25X1

25X6

US relations probably will undergo periodic strains as Doe seeks a scapegoat for mounting domestic pressures, but in our view US interests probably will not suffer serious damage even under a successor regime headed by senior military officers or leading civilian opponents.

25X6

25X6

\* \* \*

President Doe has not used the inauguration of civilian rule on 1 January to address Liberia's wide array of political and economic maladies. Confidence in Doe's stewardship continues to decline as he remains mired in the [ ] style of governing characteristic of his five year military regime. So far, he appears unable to develop an effective strategy for dealing with the political opposition, as his cosmetic attempts to place opposition members in minor government posts have been supplemented by repressive legal and security measures, including beatings and arrests of oppositionists in mid-April. The government also has damaged its credibility by ignoring or circumventing various guarantees of the civilian constitution. Prominent political figures such as Jackson Doe and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf were illegally detained for months without charge after the coup attempt, and opposition leader Gabriel Kpohle was arrested last week on allegations of sedition. [ ]

25X6

25X1

On the economic front, the US Embassy reports that Doe has taken only marginal actions, far short of what is required to stem financial and economic decay, and has made servicing the payroll his top priority, rather than economic reform. The US Embassy reports that Liberia--which uses the US dollar--is suffering a severe liquidity crisis that could grow worse because foreign earnings have already been mortgaged at least through the summer. According to the Embassy, the government also has ceased servicing both domestic and foreign debt, and as a result, the IMF has declared Liberia ineligible to use Fund resources, the World Bank has suspended credit disbursements, and US Brooke Amendment sanctions were temporarily triggered. The Embassy calculates that by mid-year Liberia's arrears to external creditors will top \$200 million. [ ]

25X1

S E C R E T

25X1

The Embassy reports that despite several desperate financial maneuvers, salary arrears still have increased, stirring discontent in the civil service and military and providing a rallying point for the political opposition. Furthermore, the loss of external credit lines already has resulted in fuel shortages and dangerously tightened supplies of politically sensitive rice imports. [ ]

25X1

We concur with the Embassy's view that Doe's [ ] leadership is at the center of Liberia's economic quagmire, and we believe that he will remain unwilling to implement painful austerity measures, fearing they would further undermine domestic stability. We also believe that years of imprudent economic policies have created problems that probably are intractable. Regardless of who takes control of economic decisionmaking. [ ]

25X1

25X1

### Opposition Party Coalition

Doe's election victory in October 1985--marred by allegations of widespread fraud--failed to reconcile the opposition parties, which recently formed a coalition to try to oust him from office. The Embassy reports that the "Grand Coalition" of the Liberian Action Party (LAP), the Liberian Unification Party (LUP), the Unity Party (UP), and the United People's Party (UPP) reflects growing disenchantment with the regime. According to the Embassy, the parties have put aside the differences that prevented a united ticket in the elections last fall, and have provisionally named as chairman UPP leader Baccus Matthews, should he return from the United States. Coalition leaders--ruling out any possibility for a compromise with the regime--plan to initiate a nationwide strike, and claim to be courting support in the military. [ ]

25X1

25X1

Although the coalition may generally represent the attitudes of a majority of Liberians, to date it has not demonstrated the organization and leadership to challenge Doe. The coalition did not fulfill earlier threats to stage public actions against the regime, and the recent jailing of 37 UPP members probably will deter Matthews from returning for the near term. We note, however, that the Embassy reports that militants in the coalition claim to have exercised self-restraint thus far, and have hinted that violent options still could be pursued. [ ]

25X1

The new coalition, however, probably places Doe's political opponents in a better position to capitalize on any spontaneous unrest generated by economic policy missteps. Last March students staged their most violent demonstrations in almost two years in support of a teachers' strike over unpaid wages, and the Embassy reports that worker discontent is being exacerbated by continued delays in pay, fears of rice shortages, and daily power blackouts. We believe that the potential for popular protests will increase steadily over the next twelve months as economic problems mount,

S E C R E T

25X1

and that the opposition parties probably would participate in and claim some credit for such actions. In the event that the coalition plays some role in Doe's overthrow, we believe that Matthews, Johnson-Sirleaf, and Jackson Doe could be called upon to take lead roles in a successor government. [ ]

25X1

25X1

### Military Grumbling

Doe's survival depends critically on maintaining support in the military, but [ ] pay arrears, tribal tensions, internal jealousies, and ineffective leadership have shattered army morale and discipline. In our judgment, the pay issue could prove most volatile as military support for Doe has rested largely on his reputation for protecting their corporate interests. [ ] discontent among both enlisted men and officers over salary arrears, and a [ ]

25X1

25X1

[ ] which was instrumental in defeating Quiwonkpa-- admitted to similar problems in his unit. [ ]

25X1

25X1

[ ] reprisals by Doe's fellow Krahn soldiers following the Quiwonkpa coup attempt have exacerbated the Army's tribal divisions, and Doe has reacted by recruiting up to 700 young Krahns without notifying other military leaders. [ ]

25X1

25X1

[ ] rumors of a secret Krahn recruitment drive will worsen tribal tensions in the EMG. Moreover, [ ] internal

25X1

S E C R E T

25X1

divisions have surfaced in the military over rumors that particular units are receiving favored treatment. [redacted]

25X1

[redacted] will try to distance themselves from Doe if political pressures continue to rise. The popular and respected Army Chief-of-Staff Dubar often has stated his wish to retire, and increasingly delegates responsibilities to subordinates.

25X1

[redacted] Moreover, [redacted] who apparently has a moderating influence on Doe, would leave his post this spring. [redacted]

25X1  
25X1  
25X1

25X1

25X6

25X1

[redacted] security officials recently arrested on suspicion of anti-government activities a member of the elite Special Anti-Terrorist Unit, which acts as Doe's bodyguard, and they are monitoring other members. Furthermore, disgruntled soldiers probably are increasingly susceptible to recruitment by anti-government elements, as [redacted] both the opposition coalition and dissidents already have made contacts with the military. At a minimum, the military's willingness and ability to support Doe in the event of a serious challenge to his rule probably will deteriorate over the next twelve months. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

### Outlook

We believe that the events of the first three months of civilian rule in Liberia reaffirm two key judgments made in the September 1985 SNIE:

- The near certainty that Liberia's political climate will not stabilize nor economic conditions improve through early 1987.
- The likelihood that Doe will continue to respond in an erratic [redacted] fashion to political and economic issues as they arise, and remain incapable of implementing a longer term governing strategy.

25X1

25X1

25X1

Even if Doe suddenly decides to enact comprehensive political and economic reforms, we do not believe he could summon the necessary cooperation from the political opposition, business sector, and bureaucracy. [redacted]

25X1

S E C R E T

25X1

Although the political opposition appears unable to mount a challenge to the regime and Liberian dissidents probably pose little threat, spontaneous protests spurred by economic problems could increase the militancy of Doe's enemies. If popular demonstrations gathered momentum, we believe Doe would have few means to diffuse tensions, and probably would order a government crackdown. A violent overreaction by security forces could trigger uncontrollable street violence and destroy the unity of the military as some soldiers joined the protests. We believe that under these circumstances prominent civilian oppositionists could forge an alliance with senior officers seeking to protect the military's corporate interests. Such a regime undoubtedly would encounter serious problems in maintaining a viable civilian/military power balance, as well as attempting economic reforms amidst popular expectations for immediate improvements. We note, however, that a diverse group of civilians--including Matthews and Johnson-Sirleaf--held important government positions in the early years of Doe's rule, and believe that a workable, moderate coalition could emerge if he were ousted. [REDACTED]

25X1

We believe, however, that the greater threat to Doe remains an outright military takeover, [REDACTED]

25X1

[REDACTED] Although senior officers probably would maintain Liberia's pro-Western policies, it is doubtful they would prove adept at tackling Liberia's problems without the participation of talented civilians. Moreover, a purely military regime probably would not enjoy much popular support, although Doe's removal could ease tensions for several months. [REDACTED]

25X6

25X6

25X1

25X6

#### Implications for the US

Monrovia's relations with the United States are likely to undergo strains as domestic pressures mount. Doe probably will periodically complain about US interference in local politics, grumble about perceived shortfalls in US assistance, threaten to turn to US adversaries for support, and probe other Western nations for more external aid. We believe, however, that Doe ultimately will try to maintain Liberia's

S E C R E T

25X1

[REDACTED]

"special relationship" with the US as long as he is in office. In our judgment, although a post-Doe government probably would be somewhat less accommodating toward the US, most prominent civilian politicians and senior military officers who might take control are generally pro-Western. Nevertheless, Doe's fall [REDACTED]

25X6

[REDACTED] might seriously jeopardize bilateral relations and reduce US influence: such a group could make unrealistic demands for US assistance or seek alternative sources of aid, while pursuing a more nationalistic, nonaligned foreign policy. [REDACTED]

25X6

25X1

S E C R E T

25X1

SUBJECT: Liberia: Doe's Growing Vulnerability

25X1

## Distribution:

Original -- Charles Freeman, Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Department of State

1 -- Ambassador James K. Bishop, Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Department of State

1 -- Princeton Lyman, Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Department of State

1 -- Ambassador Howard K. Walker, Director, Office of West African Affairs, Department of State

1 -- Anthony Dalsimer, Director INR/AA, Department of State

1 -- Noel Koch, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary International Security Affairs, Department of Defense

1 -- [REDACTED]

1 -- Constance Freeman, Liberia Desk Officer, Office of West African Affairs, Department of State

1 -- DDI

1 -- NIO for Africa

1 -- NIC

1 -- DDO/Africa

1 -- PDB Staff

1 -- C/DDI/PES

1 -- D/ALA

1 -- ALA Research Director

2 -- ALA/PS (one source copy; one clean)

4 -- CPAS/IMD/CB

4 -- ALA/AF

4 -- ALA/W [REDACTED]

4 -- ALA/W (files)

25X1

25X1

ALA/AF/W/ [REDACTED] (28 April 1986)

25X1

S E C R E T